

## Project Colibrí: University Leadership in the Design and Implementation of Social Entrepreneurship Education Initiatives

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### Abstract

*This study explores the role of universities in addressing migration-related challenges through social entrepreneurship education. Project Colibrí (Hummingbird), developed at the UABC-Yunus Center, engaged university students in the design and implementation of targeted initiatives for migrant communities in Tijuana, Mexico. Employing an action research approach, the project fostered financial literacy, sustainable entrepreneurship, and branding skills among vulnerable groups, including women, LGBTQ+ migrants, and children. Key findings highlight the effectiveness of co-creation methodologies, such as Design Thinking and the Business Model Canvas, in empowering participants to develop innovative and sustainable business solutions. The results demonstrate that interdisciplinary collaboration between academia and civil society enhances economic integration opportunities for migrant populations. This work underscores the potential of university-led social entrepreneurship education in advancing sustainable development, economic inclusion, and social innovation in border regions.*

**Keywords:** *Students; university; migration; social innovation; action research*

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## 1. Introduction

Social entrepreneurship education equips individuals with the knowledge, skills, and mindset necessary to create sustainable, value-drive enterprises that address social issues. By empowering migrant populations with the capabilities, universities can foster the development of innovative solutions to the unique challenges faced by the communities, ultimately contributing to their socio-economic integration and overall well-being (Chundu, *et al.*, 2022; Ahmad, *et al.*, 2020). This type of training transcends traditional business education by placing the social mission at the core of entrepreneurial action and promoting community engagement as a pathway toward more inclusive development.

Understanding the distinctive nature of social entrepreneurship is essential to fully grasp its transformative potential. Unlike conventional business models that focus on profit maximization, social entrepreneurship prioritizes the generation of measurable social impact. For social entrepreneurs, unmet needs, underserved populations, and even the absence of market structures represent meaningful opportunities for intervention (Austin, *et al.*, 2006). Through the innovative combination and mobilization of resources, these individuals lead initiatives aimed at driving systemic change. Although economic value creation remains important for ensuring financial sustainability, it is subordinated to the overarching social mission. Moreover, the ability to form and leverage networks (referred to as structural capital) is critical, as these relationships enable the co-creation of viable solutions, extend the reach of social action, and foster long-term resilience in vulnerable communities (Mair & Martí, 2006).

This document presents an educational practice in which university students collaboratively designed, managed, and implemented a project titled *Colibrí* (Hummingbird) in co-creation with their mentor. The initiative focused on teaching social entrepreneurship to populations experiencing mobility-related challenges, aiming to foster economic empowerment and sustainable entrepreneurial development within this vulnerable group.

Social entrepreneurship is the strategic path of creating multiple value in contexts of vulnerability. From an economics empowerment perspective, it is a mechanism for job creation, skills vigor, and access to financial inclusion mechanisms. It also provides social equity by promoting access and community participation. This is a resilience-building approach that is about sustaining livelihoods in order to build capacity to adapt to uncertainty or crisis. It also helps restore lost dignity and self worth, allowing people to become active agents and leaders in transformation. Thirdly, social entrepreneurship contributes to sustainable development through market-based, scalable solutions with a long-term impact focus (Adams, n.d.; Nerugo, *et al.*, 2019; Zhang, *et al.*, 2022).

## **2. UABC-Yunus Center: A Hub for Social Innovation**

The UABC-Yunus Center is a hub for social innovation located within the Faculty of Economics and International Relations at the Autonomous University of Baja California (UABC). It is based in Tijuana, Baja California, Mexico—a border city characterized by dynamic transnational interactions and significant migratory flows.

The center was established in 1999 as part of the Research, Assistance, and Teaching Program for Micro and Small Enterprises (PIADMYPE), a social service initiative designed to engage university students in community-based economic development by providing direct support to micro and small businesses. Since its inception, students involved in this program have offered technical assistance and mentorship to Type 2 social businesses—those born out of necessity

and serving as the primary source of income for families in vulnerable contexts—according to the classification proposed by Nobel Peace Prize laureate Muhammad Yunus (2006).

Over time, the center has expanded its scope to encompass a wider array of student-led initiatives, action-research projects, and educational programs aimed at promoting social entrepreneurship and financial education among marginalized populations.

The article *Backpack Bootstrapping: Social Entrepreneurship Education Through Experiential Learning* explores how experiential learning can transform the teaching of social entrepreneurship by placing students in real-world roles in collaboration with social organizations. Through three pedagogical approaches: action research, service learning, and traditional social venture creation: the study found that out-of-classroom experiences foster greater maturity, critical reflection, and authentic engagement with social issues. The concept of "backpack bootstrapping" refers to how bearing a tangible, albeit manageable, weight accelerates entrepreneurial skill development. Despite its exploratory nature, the study underscores the importance of integrating practical engagement with reflective learning to prepare agents of change (Thomsen, *et al.*, 2019).

Similarly, *Action Research in Social Entrepreneurship: A Framework for Involvement* introduces a methodological framework grounded in action research to navigate the complexity of social entrepreneurship projects. Using the Mushuk Muyu case in Ecuador, it illustrates how the Action Research Cycle (ARC): comprising problem identification, thematic analysis, strategic planning, implementation, and reflection, can sustain participatory, context-sensitive, and adaptive processes. This approach fosters local ownership and collective value creation, enabling meaningful learning and sustainable transformation in communities (Tasker, *et al.*, 2010).

## **2.1. Project Colibrí: Addressing Migration at the Border**

In 2024, as part of its commitment to tackling pressing social challenges, the UABC-Yunus Center launched Project *Colibrí*, an initiative co-created by four students completing their professional internships at the center, in collaboration with the coordinator of the Yunus Community axis. The project focused on migration issues at the border, aiming to understand and support migrant populations through research, community engagement, and strategic partnerships. The first phase of Project *Colibrí* involved an in-depth documentary analysis of migration dynamics in Tijuana. Based on this research, specific subgroups affected by migration through an intersectional lens were identified, including children, job seekers, LGBTQ+ migrants, and women.

Following this analysis, the team conducted a mapping of civil society organizations and institutions already providing on-the-ground support to these migrant populations. Each student then assumed a leadership role within a designated subgroup, leading to the establishment of

collaborative partnerships with organizations such as Border Youth, Borderline Crisis, Centro 32, Casa Arcoiris, and Al Norte Sin Límites.

## **2.2. Implementation and Community Impact**

After establishing these partnerships, Project Colibrí developed and implemented various targeted initiatives:

Financial Education for Migrant Children (Border Youth): As part of the *Tijuanita Mi Ciudad* event, an interactive stand was created, featuring educational games and storytelling activities focused on financial literacy. This initiative was designed specifically for children in mobility contexts, equipping them with basic financial skills through engaging and age-appropriate methodologies (Figure 1).



*Figure 1. Financial education for migrant children*

Environmental Awareness and Sustainable Entrepreneurship (Borderline Crisis): A workshop titled "Guardians of the Environment" was developed as a mini-rally, aimed at fostering entrepreneurial thinking and sustainability awareness among children living in a shelter for migrant populations. Through interactive activities, participants explored environmental challenges and generated sustainable business ideas within their communities (Figure 2).



*Figure 2. Mini-rally*

Social Entrepreneurship and Branding for Women (Centro 32): A specialized workshop on social entrepreneurship was conducted for a group of six women, utilizing Design Thinking methodology to help them develop innovative business ideas. Additionally, a doctoral student in Social Business facilitated a branding workshop, sharing insights on brand development, value proposition design, and market positioning through a practical case study (Figure 3).



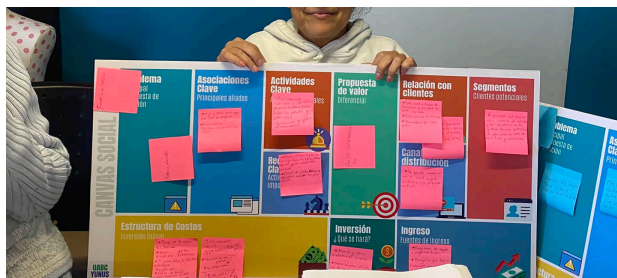
*Figure 3. Centro 32*

Sustainable Entrepreneurship for LGBTQ+ Migrants (Casa Arcoiris): A two-day training program was delivered to two LGBTQ+ migrants, focusing on sustainable entrepreneurship. The workshop provided strategic business development tools, encouraging participants to conceptualize social enterprises with both economic and environmental impact (Figure 4).



*Figure 4. Casa Arcoiris*

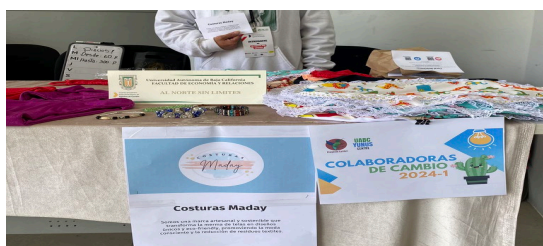
**Social Entrepreneurship Training for Migrant Women in the Textile Industry (Al Norte Sin Límites):** A three-session training program was conducted for five migrant women from Colombia, Guatemala, Venezuela, and Haiti, all of whom were employed in a textile factory. The program incorporated Design Thinking, Business Model Canvas, and Pitching Techniques to equip participants with practical entrepreneurial skills and a structured framework for developing sustainable business models.



*Figure 5. Al norte sin limites*

### **2.3. Collective Participation in the Fourth Inter-University Meeting of Change Agents**

As a culminating activity, all five partner institutions participated in the Fourth Inter-University Meeting of Change Agents, where they showcased and sold their products at dedicated stands. This event provided an opportunity to highlight the impact of the initiatives, strengthen networks among social enterprises, and foster collaboration between academia and the broader social innovation ecosystem.



**Agents of Change – Maday Stitches:**  
We are an artisanal and sustainable brand that transforms textile remnants into unique, eco-friendly designs, promoting conscious fashion and the reduction of textile waste.

*Figure 6. Collective participation*

## **3. Conclusion**

Through *Project Colibrí* and its broader initiatives, the UABC-Yunus Center continues to demonstrate its commitment to bridging academic knowledge with real-world social impact. By fostering entrepreneurial education, sustainability, and economic empowerment, the center remains dedicated to supporting vulnerable communities, promoting social innovation, and equipping students with the skills needed to drive meaningful change in the border region and

beyond. Rooted in this vision, the Yunus Social Innovation Laboratory was created as an evolution of Project Colibrí. It has moved beyond providing workshops that encourage entrepreneurship to become a space for the co-creation of community-based social enterprises. In this environment, participants not only gain knowledge but also design and implement projects collaboratively with the university. This educational model has been strengthened by the *Impaktante* philosophy of the UABC-Yunus Center. This philosophy defines *Impaktantes* as individuals who commit to transforming their realities through action, empathy, and creativity.

The nine-week training program is currently being implemented in two key contexts. In a rehabilitation and reintegration center for men, participants are developing a Type 1 social business (Yunus, 2010) focused on the production of vegan bags. Meanwhile, at the Tijuana Juvenile Detention Center, adolescents are co-designing a Type 1 social enterprise for the creation of handcrafted lamps. Throughout this process, participants work to strengthen their self-esteem, build entrepreneurial skills, and develop their capacity to collaborate for the common good. The emphasis is not only on learning technical competencies, but also on rebuilding a sense of purpose and belonging.

University students play a crucial role in this initiative. Coming from diverse academic backgrounds, they participate as workshop facilitators, content designers, field assistants, and organizers of solidarity fundraising campaigns. This experiential learning model redefines the role of the university. Rather than functioning solely as a source of knowledge transmission, the university becomes a proactive agent of social transformation with a visible and sustained presence in the community.

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## **Ethical Note**

All adult participants gave verbal consent to participate and to allow photography under the explicit condition that their faces would not be shown. For minors, consent was obtained from legal guardians or institutional supervisors. In all cases, images were selected to protect participants' identity and dignity, in alignment with ethical standards for working with vulnerable populations.

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